Westfield
STATE UNIVERSITY

Research Lab Working Alone Guidelines

Purpose

The Working Alone guidelines are intended to promote awareness and facilitate safety when working alone. Generally it is prudent for undergraduate students not to work alone. Exceptions may be made for low-risk work if the faculty verifies that a student fully understands normal and emergency procedures, and uses all required protective equipment. Students must be trained in work and emergency procedures, including use of emergency equipment. Students can work alone in the laboratory as long as the faculty and/or staff who are responsible for the students are on campus. Students are expected to follow the safety rules and act responsibly while working alone. Failure to do so is a violation of the University policy as written in the Student Handbook under Student Conduct Regulations and Procedures. Violations will be handled through the University disciplinary procedure.

Scope

These guidelines apply to students who are registered to do independent research. No students enrolled in teaching laboratories are allowed to work alone in laboratories.

Guidelines

-Students must be enrolled in independent research for credit.
-Students must have completed the Research Lab Access Approval Form.
-Students must attend the Laboratory Safety training given by the Chemical Hygiene Officer.
-Students must have approval for working alone from the faculty.
-Experiments known to be hazardous are not to be undertaken and only low-risk procedures can be conducted while working alone.
-There are certain situations where working alone will not be permitted.

The following laboratory tasks should never be conducted when alone:
-Procedures involving particularly hazardous chemicals such as air and water reactive, explosive, acutely toxic, peroxide forming, strong corrosives, oxidizing and reducing agents, and regulated carcinogens. Also, biohazardous materials such as biosafety level 2 materials and select agents.
-Procedures involving high-pressure equipment, rotovaps, autoclaves, and HPLCs.
-Procedures involving open flames with a Bunsen burner.
The following laboratory tasks can be conducted when working alone:
-Checking on laboratory equipment or experiment.
-Performing experiments with low risk as determined by faculty.
-Cleaning or maintenance activities.

Faculty responsibilities

- Complete the faculty section of the Research Lab Access Approval Form.
-Identify risks or hazards associated with work to be performed or environment where work is to be done.
- Provide written working alone procedures in order to eliminate or minimize identified risks.
- Document when working alone is permitted and/or prohibited and ensure this is effectively communicated to all.
- Schedule potentially hazardous work for times when supervisors and appropriate help will be available.
- Faculty or designee must periodically check on students when working alone.

Student responsibilities

- Complete the Research Lab Access Approval Form.
-Participate in identifying risks or hazards with faculty.
- Follow safe work practices as determined by faculty.
- Maintain regular communication as directed by faculty.
- Only work in the laboratory when the faculty or designee are in the laboratory after normal working hours.

Chemical Hygiene Officer/Laboratory Safety Committee

- Determine student eligibility for working alone based on data from Research Lab Access Approval Form.
- Monitor applicable legislation to ensure the Working Alone policy is up to date with regulatory requirements.
- Provide consultation to faculty for development of departmental and/or site-specific working alone plans.
- Develop, modify and update as required a standard working alone procedures.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the Working Alone procedures.

Working Alone Risk Assessments

Working alone permission will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis and will consider the following risk factors for working alone:
- Tasks and hazards involved in the work to be performed.
- Consequences resulting from a “worst case scenario”.
- Likelihood for other persons to be in the area.
- Possibility that a critical injury or incident could prevent the employee from calling for help or leaving the workplace.
- Emergency response time.
- Student’s training and experience.
- Student’s physical handicaps or any preexisting medical conditions.
- Frequency of supervision, if at all.
- The time when the work is to be done.

Supervisors shall provide written working alone safety plans for the safety and security of persons working alone. Safety plans shall include:
- Identification of the risks or hazards associated with the work to be performed or the environment where the work is to be done;
-Procedures to eliminate or minimize the identified risks (e.g., buddy systems);
- Methods of communication by which the workers can secure emergency assistance and how emergency assistance will be provided in the event of incidents or accidents.
-The length of time a worker may be out of contact with a supervisor (i.e., the frequency of regular communications);
-Confirmation where and when working alone is permitted.

Supervisors must review working alone safety plans with affected employees with particular emphasis on safe work procedures and the provision of assistance to employees at risk due to infrequent supervision, intermittent communication, or physical isolation. Completed working alone plans must be copied to the employee, department Chairs, and to EH&S. Written safety plans should be reviewed and updated, if required, at least annually.